

Geneva church ready to help more after its expansion

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**St. Peter** Catholic Church will show off an expansion the church has planned since 1995 with an open house from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday.

As Geneva grew, the church saw its congregation grow as well, and in 1995 began thinking of ways the church building could serve the community better. In that time, Geneva continued to add families, and the church's education programs gained students until there was no room for a single extra student.

The church itself, built in 1993, had been built with a growing community in mind. But the administration wing and the education facilities, which housed the church's elementary and middle school as well as after-school religious education for public school students, had been built more than 40 years ago.

Another consideration was the church's food pantry, which serves families in Geneva as well as **St. Charles**, Batavia and North Aurora. Before the renovations, the pantry used the church kitchen, and twice a month volunteers hauled food and supplies to the kitchen for distribution to needy families and senior citizens.

Now, the education wing has a second floor, which includes more classrooms as well as a library and computer lab. There also is a new gym. The food pantry has its own home. The administration offices are larger and renovated, and have new meeting rooms. Now, teens have a place where they can gather to socialize, do homework, pray and meditate.

The Rev. Thomas G. Doran, Bishop of Rockford, will dedicate the 50,000-square-foot addition and 24,000 square feet of renovations at the 4 p.m. Mass today. The renovations, which began early last year, were completed in August.

With the extra classroom space, **St. Peter** will be able to enroll up to 600 students in its school, which offers preschool through eighth grade. The load was handled for a while by mobile classroom units. Although there still is a waiting list for many grades, the school will be able to admit about 50 more students.

Most importantly, there is now plenty of room for the church's huge after-school religious education program. The 1,300 students enrolled previously had been packing the building each day after school. Now, **St. Peter** has the room to educate 200 to 300 more students in the Catholic faith.

Students also will have the use of a computer lab, where each station has Internet access, as well as a computer with Internet access in each classroom. There also is the new library, which has the capacity for 20,000 volumes.

The new gym not only has a new scoreboard, bleachers that seat 250, a new sound system and a small stage, but it also allows the church to offer "some of the things they haven't been able to accommodate before - the retirement club is going to use the space for card club and activities," said Rama Canney, the church's communication's manager.

One of the more important additions, according to Canney, is the new Panis Angelicus Adoration Chapel. The chapel is open 24 hours, seven days a week for the express purpose of adoring the Blessed Sacrament - based on the Catholic belief that bread and wine, once consecrated by a

priest, become the real presence of Jesus.

The chapel was designed simply, with no decoration or artwork other than a simple portrait of two angels. There aren't even any windows.

"There's nothing to distract us from focusing on the Eucharist," said Monsignor Joseph F. Jarmoluk, senior pastor at **St. Peter**.

The pantry has gained the most with the renovations. Moving the food back and forth from storage to the church kitchen twice a month was something of a pain for the volunteers. Then there was the panic last year when the pantry needed to close for the renovations, but had nowhere to go.

After finding a temporary home in Aurora, the pantry now has its own space, with a basement storage area and an elevator to help volunteers restock the pantry shelves. But the people who win the most are the patrons.

"It's going much more smoothly for the people. They're not having to wait as long," Canney said. "It's just going to be more efficient."

The open house on Sunday will be a self-guided tour with hosts available who can offer directions and explanations about some of the new features. There will be refreshments, and tours of the church itself available. Although the church building is not new, and was not part of the renovations or additions, it does feature interesting architecture and artwork, much of which was provided by parishioners.

**St. Peter** Catholic Church officially began with a dedication May 30, 1913 of its first church building at Fifth and James streets in Geneva. Before that, Geneva Catholics attended church in Batavia, then Mass in Geneva at the Unitarian church.

The property on Kaneville Road was bought in 1958, with the school and a temporary church dedicated in 1959. Parishioners attended Mass in this temporary church, actually the school gymnasium, until 1993, when the church was completed and dedicated.

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